

## Fitness Workers

(O\*NET 39-9031.00)

### Significant Points

- Many group fitness and personal training jobs are part time, but many workers increase their hours by working at several different facilities or at clients' homes.
- Night and weekend working hours are common.
- Most fitness workers need to be certified.
- Employment prospects are expected to be good because of rapid growth in the fitness industry.

### Nature of the Work

Fitness workers lead, instruct, and motivate individuals or groups in exercise activities, including cardiovascular exercise, strength training, and stretching. They work in commercial and nonprofit health clubs, country clubs, hospitals, universities, yoga and Pilates studios, resorts, and clients' homes. Increasingly, fitness workers also are found in workplaces, where they organize and direct health and fitness programs for employees of all ages.

Although gyms and health clubs offer a variety of exercise activities such as weightlifting, yoga, cardiovascular training, and karate, fitness workers typically specialize in only a few areas.

*Personal trainers* work one-on-one with clients either in a gym or in the client's home. Trainers help clients assess their level of physical fitness and set and reach fitness goals. Trainers also demonstrate various exercises and help clients improve their exercise techniques. Trainers may keep records of their clients' exercise sessions to assess clients' progress toward physical fitness.

*Group exercise instructors* conduct group exercise sessions that involve aerobic exercise, stretching, and muscle conditioning. Because cardiovascular conditioning classes often involve movement to music, outside of class instructors must choose and mix the music and choreograph a corresponding exercise sequence. Pilates and yoga are two increasingly popular conditioning methods taught in exercise classes. Instructors demonstrate the different moves and positions of the particular method; they also observe students and correct those who are doing the exercises improperly. Group exercise instructors are responsible for ensuring that their classes are motivating, safe, and challenging, yet not too difficult for the participants.

*Fitness directors* oversee the fitness-related aspects of a health club or fitness center. Their work involves creating and maintaining programs that meet the needs of the club's members, including new member orientations, fitness assessments, and workout incentive programs. They also select fitness equipment; coordinate personal training and group exercise programs; hire, train, and supervise fitness staff; and carry out administrative duties.

Fitness workers in smaller facilities with few employees may perform a variety of functions in addition to their fitness duties, such as tending the front desk, signing up new members, giving tours of the fitness center, writing newsletter articles, creating posters and flyers, and supervising the weight training and cardiovascular equipment areas. In larger commercial facilities, personal trainers are often required to sell their services to members and to make a specified number of sales. Some fitness workers may combine the duties of group exercise instructors and personal trainers, and in smaller facilities, the fitness director may teach classes and do personal training.



*Personal trainers work one-on-one with their clients to help them achieve their fitness goals.*

(Workers in a related occupation—*athletes, coaches, umpires, and related workers*—participate in organized sports; this occupation is described elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

### Working Conditions

Most fitness workers spend their time indoors at fitness centers and health clubs. Fitness directors and supervisors, however, typically spend most of their time in an office, planning programs and special events and tending to administrative issues. Those in smaller fitness centers may split their time among the office, personal training, and teaching classes. Directors and supervisors generally engage in less physical activity than do lower-level fitness workers. Nevertheless, workers at all levels risk suffering injuries during physical activities.

Since most fitness centers are open long hours, fitness workers often work nights and weekends and even occasional holidays. Some may have to travel from place to place throughout the day, to different gyms or to clients' homes, to maintain a full work schedule.

Fitness workers generally enjoy a lot of autonomy. Group exercise instructors choreograph or plan their own classes, and personal trainers have the freedom to design and implement their clients' workout routines.

### Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Personal trainers must obtain certification in the fitness field to gain employment, while group fitness instructors do not necessarily need certification to begin working. The most important characteristic that an employer looks for in a new group fitness instructor is the ability to plan and lead a class that is motivating and safe. Group fitness instructors often get started by participating in exercise classes, and some become familiar enough to successfully audition and begin teaching class. They also may improve their skills by taking training courses or attending fitness conventions. Most organizations encourage their group instructors to become certified, and many require it.

In the fitness field, there are many organizations—some of which are listed in the last section of this statement—that offer certification. Becoming certified by one of the top certification organizations is increasingly important, especially for personal trainers. One way to ensure that a certifying organization is reputable is to see whether it is accredited or seeking accreditation by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies.

Most certifying organizations require candidates to have a high school diploma, be certified in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and pass an exam. All certification exams have a written component, and some also have a practical component. The exams measure knowledge of human physiology, proper exercise techniques, assessment of client fitness levels, and development of appropriate exercise programs. There is no particular training program required for certifications; candidates may prepare however they prefer. Certifying organizations do offer study materials, including books, CD-ROMs, other audio and visual materials, and exam preparation workshops and seminars, but exam candidates are not required to purchase materials to sit for the exams. Certification generally is good for 2 years, after which workers must become recertified by attending continuing education classes. Some organizations offer more advanced certification, requiring an associate or bachelor's degree in an exercise-related subject for individuals interested in training athletes, working with people who are injured or ill, or advising clients on whole-life health.

Training for Pilates and yoga teachers is changing. Because interest in these forms of exercise has exploded in recent years, the demand for teachers has grown faster than the ability to train them properly. However, because inexperienced teachers have contributed to student injuries, there has been a push toward more standardized, rigorous requirements for teacher training.

Pilates and yoga teachers usually do not need group exercise certifications like the ones described above. It is more important that they have specialized training in their particular method of exercise. For Pilates, training options range from weekend-long workshops to year-long programs, but the trend is toward requiring more training. The Pilates Method Alliance has established training standards that recommend at least 200 hours of training; the group also has standards for training schools and maintains a list of training schools that meet the requirements. However, some Pilates teachers are certified group exercise instructors who go through short Pilates workshops; currently, many fitness centers hire people with minimal Pilates training if the applicants have a fitness certification and group fitness experience.

Training requirements for yoga teachers are similar to those for Pilates teachers. Training programs range from a few days to more than 2 years. Many people get their start by taking yoga; eventually, their teachers may consider them suited to assist or to substitute teach. Some students may begin teaching their own classes when their yoga teachers think they are ready; the teachers may even provide letters of recommendation. Those who wish to pursue teaching more seriously usually then pursue formal teacher training. Currently, there are many training programs through the yoga community as well as programs through the fitness industry. The Yoga Alliance has established training standards of at least 200 training hours, with a specified number of hours in areas including techniques, teaching methodology, anatomy, physiology, and philosophy. The Yoga Alliance also registers schools that train students to the standards. Because some schools may meet the standards but not be registered, prospective students should check the requirements and decide if particular schools meet them.

An increasing number of employers require fitness workers to have a bachelor's degree in a field related to health or fitness, such as exercise science or physical education. Some employers allow workers to substitute a college degree for certification, but most employers who require a bachelor's degree require both a degree and certification.

People planning fitness careers should be outgoing, good at motivating people, and sensitive to the needs of others. Excellent health and physical fitness are important due to the physical nature of the job. Those who wish to be personal trainers in a large commercial fitness center should have strong sales skills.

Fitness workers usually do not receive much on-the-job training; they are expected to know how to do their jobs when they are hired. The exception is newly certified personal trainers with no work experience, who sometimes begin by working alongside an experienced trainer before being allowed to train clients alone. Workers may receive some organizational training to learn about the operations of their new employer. They occasionally receive specialized training if they are expected to teach or lead a specific method of exercise or focus on a particular age or ability group.

A bachelor's degree, and in some cases a master's degree, in exercise science, physical education, kinesiology, or a related area, along with experience, usually is required to advance to management positions in a health club or fitness center. As in many fields, managerial skills are needed to advance to supervisory or managerial positions. College courses in management, business administration, accounting, and personnel management may be helpful for advancement to supervisory or managerial jobs, but many fitness companies have corporate universities in which they train employees for management positions.

Personal trainers may advance to head trainer, with responsibility for hiring and overseeing the personal training staff and for bringing in new personal training clients. Group fitness instructors may be promoted to group exercise director, responsible for hiring instructors and coordinating exercise classes. A next possible step is the fitness director, who manages the fitness budget and staff. The general manager's main focus is on the financial aspect of the organization, particularly setting and achieving sales goals; in a small fitness center, however, the general manager usually is involved with all aspects of running the facility.

Some workers go into business for themselves and open their own fitness centers.

## **Employment**

Fitness workers held about 205,000 jobs in 2004. Almost all personal trainers and group exercise instructors worked in physical fitness facilities, health clubs, and fitness centers, mainly in the amusement and recreation industry or in civic and social organizations. About 7 percent of fitness workers were self-employed; many of these were personal trainers, while others were group fitness instructors working on a contract basis with fitness centers. Many fitness jobs are part time, and many workers hold multiple jobs, teaching and/or doing personal training at several different fitness centers and at clients' homes.

## **Job Outlook**

Opportunities are expected to be good for fitness workers because of rapid growth in the fitness industry. Many job openings also will stem from the need to replace the large numbers of workers who leave these occupations each year.

Employment of fitness workers—who are concentrated in the rapidly growing arts, entertainment, and recreation industry—is expected to increase much faster than the average for all occupations through 2014. An increasing number of people spend more time and money on fitness, and more businesses are recognizing the benefits of health and fitness programs and other services such as wellness programs for their employees.

Aging baby boomers are concerned with staying healthy, physically fit, and independent. They have become the largest demographic

group of health club members. The reduction of physical education programs in schools, combined with parents' growing concern about childhood obesity, has resulted in rapid increases in children's health club membership. Increasingly, athletic youth also are hiring personal trainers, and weight-training gyms for children younger than 18 are expected to continue to grow. Health club membership among young adults also has grown steadily, driven by concern with physical fitness and by rising incomes.

As health clubs strive to provide more personalized service to keep their members motivated, they will continue to offer personal training and a wide variety of group exercise classes. Participation in yoga and Pilates is expected to continue to grow, driven partly by the aging population demanding low-impact forms of exercise and relief from ailments such as arthritis.

### **Earnings**

Median annual earnings of personal trainers and group exercise instructors in May 2004 were \$25,470. The middle 50 percent earned between \$17,380 and \$40,030. The bottom 10 percent earned less than \$14,530 while the top 10 percent earned \$55,560 or more. Earnings of successful self-employed personal trainers can be much higher. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of fitness workers in May 2004 were as follows:

Other amusement and recreation industries .....	\$28,670
Other schools and instruction.....	22,320
Civic and social organizations .....	20,530

Because many fitness workers work part time, they often do not receive benefits such as health insurance or retirement plans from their employers. They do get the unusual benefit of the use of fitness facilities at no cost.

### **Related Occupations**

Occupations that focus on physical fitness, as do fitness workers, include athletes, coaches, umpires, and related workers.

### **Sources of Additional Information**

For more information about fitness careers, and to find universities and other institutions offering programs in health and fitness, contact:

► IDEA Health and Fitness Association, 10455 Pacific Center Crt., San Diego, CA 92121-4339.

For information about personal trainer and group fitness instructor certifications, contact:

► American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Dr., San Diego, CA 92123. Internet: <http://www.acefitness.org>

► American College of Sports Medicine, P.O. Box 1440, Indianapolis, IN 46206-1440. Internet: <http://www.acsm.org>

► National Academy of Sports Medicine, 26632 Agoura Rd., Calabasas, CA 91302. Internet: <http://www.nasm.org>

► National Strength and Conditioning Association Certification Commission, 3333 Landmark Circle, Lincoln, NE 68504. Internet: <http://www.nsca-cc.org>

For information about Pilates certification, and to find training programs, contact:

► Pilates Method Alliance, P.O. Box 370906, Miami, FL 33137-0906. Internet: <http://www.pilatesmethodalliance.org>

For information on yoga teacher training, and to find training programs, contact:

► Yoga Alliance, 7801 Old Branch Ave., Suite 400, Clinton, MD 20735. Internet: <http://www.yogaalliance.org>

To find accredited fitness certification programs, contact:

► National Commission for Certifying Agencies, 2025 M St., NW., Suite 800, Washington, DC 20036. Internet: <http://www.noca.org/ncca/accredorg.htm>